

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 1103, Section 10
Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
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Co-Chairs Fonfara and Scanlon, Vice-Chairs Moore, Kairos DeGraw, and Meskers, Ranking Members Martin and Cheeseman, and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~130 land trusts. We advocate for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and work to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of CLCC in strong opposition to **Section 10 of Senate Bill No. 1103, An Act Concerning Emissions And Decibel Level Testing, The Taxation Of Certain Motorcycles And Parts And The Passport To The Parks Fee** which would severely undermine the "Passport to the Parks" -- a program which generates significant funding for the maintenance of Connecticut State Parks and also gives all Connecticut residents free access to the State Parks.

Section 10 of SB 1103 would restrict the Passport to the Parks fee (a \$5/year/vehicle registration fee paid to DMV) to single car-owners only. Owners of multiple vehicles would no longer pay a fee on the additional vehicles they register. This change to the Passport to the Parks program would cut funding for State Parks by 50% or more, and likely result in the closure of various State Parks, campgrounds, and other public amenities supported by the program, at a time when demand for such resources and amenities is at an all-time high.

One of the state's top tourism destinations, Connecticut's 110 State Parks welcome over 10 million visitors annually. According to the Office of Legislative Research (OLR), attendance increased by approximately 10% compared to prior years after the institution of the Passport to the Parks program in 2018. ¹

Connecticut State Parks are worth the investment. In 2019, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), outdoor recreation activities in Connecticut had a value add to the state's gross domestic product (GDP) of \$3.7 billion. These activities also supported 49,097 jobs. ²

Most critically, throughout the challenges of this past year, people across the state have turned to Connecticut State Parks, forests, and other public and private open spaces as sources of solace and respite. Never has the need for equitable access to the outdoors been more important and impactful.

The Passport to the Parks is working as intended. Please **oppose Section 10 of SB 1103** and ensure that the Passport to the Parks stays intact, with no exemptions or diversions, as was proposed in the Governor's FY 2022-23 Budget.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. I would be happy to answer any question you may have.

¹Office of Legislative Research Issue Brief State Park and Forest Funding (2020-R-0296) (December 22, 2020)

² Id.

